

# Lore of the MITSFS

## #1: The Officers

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Newcomers to the MITSFS often stop to puzzle over a large organizational chart that hangs by the door to the circulating room. (See the reproduction accompanying this article; the original, created by Greg Ruffa, is much more impressive.) They are generally advised not to try to make sense of it. This is sound advice, because even by MITSFS standards the chart has little relationship to reality. Only a small number of the offices are filled in any official fashion, and many are mere relics of the past.

However, the chart does provide some insight into the history and traditions of the MITSFS, although, as in most oral traditions, conflicting versions of the past abound. In the interest of collecting some of this history (as well as filling some pages in TZ), I have put together all known or guessed-at information about the origins and functions of the various Officers of the MITSFS. Any old-timers who cherish different versions are welcome to let us know.

## 1 The Star Chamber

President: Has but one power, to appoint the Skinner, who runs everything. This division of offices was made in the days when Institute rules required that the President and Treasurer of student organizations be undergraduates, in case a time should come when there were no undergrads qualified to run the MITSFS. Except in unusual circumstances, the President usually appoints him or herself Skinner.

Skinner: Ruler of the MITSFS. Definer of Natural Constants, Keeper of the Gavel, etc., etc. L. Court Skinner was a popular two-term President of the Society, circa 1960-63. Prior to his tenure, each MITSFS committee had its own province and made its own decisions; Skinner consolidated them under the authority of the President. When he graduated, the office was named after him.

Vice: *Not* Miami. A fairly obvious choice of names.

Lord(Lady) High Embezzler: The LHE keeps track of the money and is traditionally supposed to abscond to Brazil with it. The use of this title in

a listing for *Technique* prompted yearbook types to call the Onseck into their office because they felt the wording was libelous. They did not accept the offer to come see the MITSFS's organizational chart, but did print the listing.

Onseck: Named during a period when Cordwainer Smith was in vogue around the MITSFS. It comes from his novel *Norstrilia*, in which the title had evolved from "Honorable Secretary." The Onseck keeps the minutes, deals with correspondence, and does other such Onsecknal things.

## 2 Other Offices on the Chart

Permanent Deceased Librarian and President: This office is held by George Phillies, who is still among the living, or at least looks like he is. As Skinner, he bought the collection of paperbacks that formed the nucleus of the book portion of the Library. He also helped found the Strategic Games Society (S.G.S.).

Jourcomm: Journal Committee. responsible for editing and publishing *Twilight Zine*. The post was inspired by Hugo Gernsback's urging that the Society publish an educational journal. This probably isn't what he had in mind. The traditional Jourcomm report at meetings is "TZ Real Soon Now," sometimes supplemented with plaintive requests that people write something.

Libcomm: Library Committee. Originally responsible for nearly all the work involved in running the Library. Its functions were eventually split into other committees. Nowadays it is identified with Ken Johnson, who is responsible for the magazine collection and some of the rarer books.

Interactivities Liaison: The greasiest person around, and originally a joke. MITSFS has become substantially greasier in recent years, with the apex probably a two-year period when a UA Vice President (ken Meltsner) was a former Onseck, one Skinner (Judy Passman) was ASA President, and the following Skinner (Tim Huckelbery) was LSC Chairman.

ROSFAP: Registrar of Science Fictional Amateur Publications. In other words, keeps track of the fanzines.

Atomcomm: See **Seitz**, below.

Vergeltungsflotte: German for Vengeance Fleet, usually abbreviated VGG. Seeks to recover books and money due the Library, and imposes fines on naughty Keyholders.

Eli Heffron & Sons: A Cambridge electronics surplus store.

People's Albanian Embassy: When someone is flaming (or, more often these days, makes a bad pun) at a MITSFS Meeting, and people don't want to listen to him, his speech is defined to be in Albanian. The People's Albanian Embassy exists so the Society can communicate with him if need be. The Embassy is also responsible for collecting science fiction written in Albanian.

Seitz: J. Russel Seitz, once Vice, was reputed to have a Titan II missile (or three Atlas missiles — the stories vary) which he had constructed out of government surplus parts. He may also have claimed to be capable of acquiring an atomic warhead; however other versions of the story say Atomcomm was responsible for obtaining one. Atomcomm was also in charge of acquiring money for

the Society by atomic, biological, or chemical blackmail. The Spofford Painting (see Spofford) was at one time named Lord High Blackmailer. (Seitz is now at Hahvahd and is occasionally quoted in the press as an expert on nuclear weapons.)

National Committee to Map John Kenneth Galbraith into the Complex Plane, Inc.: Just what it says.

Theftcomm: In charge of stealing the Bonestell murals from the Boston Museum of Science. Failing that, in charge of putting up posters advertising the MITSFS. It took over the functions of the previously existing Compost (Poster Committee), Feecomm (Feeler Committee), and Publicity Committee.

Moocomm: Movie Committee. In the distant past, MITSFS's major source of income was the science fiction movies it showed once per term. Circa 1965, LSC become the only organization allowed to show movies regularly and charge admission, thus making Moocomm obsolete. Moocomm now reports on science fiction movies being shown by LSC or elsewhere in the area.

Coofcomm: Colonial Office Committee. In charge of helping fledgling sf clubs at other schools (e.g. ChUSFA at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana). Also responsible for maintaining a strict policy of mercantilism with regard to fledgling sf clubs.

Carnalcomm: Carnival Committee. Up until the late '60s, APO ran a carnival every spring at which student activities had booths; Carnalcomm ran the MITSFS booth. Carnalcomm is now in charge of the MITSFS booth at the Activities Midway, held for the incoming freshlings each fall.

Picniccomm: Buys food and mails invitations for the annual MITSFS Picnic.

Hostess: Looks pretty at the picnic. (Well, the office was established in the mid-60s.)

Gavelcomm: Keeps track of the Gavel.

Titancomm: Keeps track of the titanium Gavel Block.

Atlascomm: Finds a rock suitable for substituting for the Gavel Block, or lugs the Block itself to Elections, Boskone, etc.

Wellcomm: Wellesley Committee. Set up in 1967 to absorb Wellesley into the Library. Later responsible for publicizing MITSFS at Wellesley. It has fallen into disuse these days, I suppose because of the increased number of women at MIT.

Fweekcomm: Freshman Week Committee. Coordinates MITSFS membership recruitment during R/O week.

Cofincomm: Committee for Foreign Correspondence. Established to maintain communication with Dick Harter when he went to South Dakota.

Meyercomm: Keeps track of Ed Meyer, a super-fan of the '60s, who started an APA called **Ed's APA**, the members of which formed the nucleus of what became **NESFA** (The North East Shanghai Food Association).

Spofford: MITSFS meetings used to be held in the Spofford Room, which belongs to the Civil Engineering department and contains a large portrait of Spofford. Regular meetings are now held in the Library itself, but Election Meetings are still held under Spofford's gaze.

Deceased Plant: A dead potted plant in the Spofford Room was made a Quaternary Officer for failing to defeat the Evil ARLewis for the office of Onseck. After it left, various other objects (equally dead) were named **Honorary Plant**.

Catacomm: Catalogs the magazines. Like Libcomm, the post is identified with Ken Johnson.

Flushcomm: In charge of arranging to have all the Institute toilets flushed at once, to test the theory that doing so would destroy the Institute's plumbing.

Bootcomm: The Alpert, who was Skinner from 1970-72 (his first name is Marc; I don't know when the Society stopped referring to Skinners with the definite Article) used to wear big boots.

Moccomm: The Davidson (Scott), who was Skinner after The Alpert, wore moccasins. Skinnerial footwear seems to have become rather dull afterward, since there are no more offices named after it.

Throgcomm: Wears hideous yellow polka-dot ties to meetings.

Flamecomm: Flames at meetings. (For whatever non-MIT types may have gotten this far, I should explain that flaming is an all-purpose MITism referring to any speech that is too loud, too obnoxious, too long-winded, too argumentative, too political, or otherwise annoying.)

Randomcomm: Detects and gloats over scientific errors in SF.

Untitledcomm: (Represented by an empty box on the Chart.) Writes weird replies to weird Letters the MITSFS gets. Originally set up in 1972 to respond to a letter from UCLA asking for advice on how to form an SF society, saying they only had a comic book club. The committee consisted of Irwin T. Lapeer (aka Guy Consolmagno).

Slobcomm: Set up to investigate the question of what evil Mr. Lobdell could have done to cause a dining hall to be named after him. It was also in charge of writing words with calculators (e.g. 77308075 is Slobdell upside down). This was considered highly amusing back in 1973 when calculators first came out.

Tablecomm (R.I.P.): Created in 1961 to arrange informal discussions of SF by MITSFS members and other. (May also have been in charge of caring for the MITSFS's microfilm and tape collections, such as they are.) its exact fate is shrouded in mystery, though it is rumored that it eventually deteriorated into a comic book discussion group and died out. Others hold that it was abolished and even its named effaced because its members were obnoxious.

Den Mother : (There are six blank spaces after "mother.") This office is awarded to the person in the MIT administration who screws over the MITSFS most. There are always more than enough candidates.

GAcomm: General Assembly Committee. Attended meetings of the GA, which used to be "governing" body of the Undergraduate Association. It was recently replaced by the UA Council, which is smaller but functions just as well. The office was a joke, too.

Official Theologian: The person who pontificates the most. The Alpert was appointed to both this office and that of **Chief Hairsplitter, 2nd Class** for hairsplitting, etc.

Chief Biter: Like the above, mostly self-explanatory. A person who is stupidly obnoxious in a destructive manner.

Baloneycomm: Brings baloney to the Picnic.

Charcomm: Burns the roast beef for the Picnic.

Pumpkincomm: Reaffirms the Society's faith in the Great Pumpkin each Halloween. For a time, also had the duty of making sure that the Foreign Students bulletin board had posted on it the Sunday comics, particularly Peanuts, the Wizard of Id, and Pogo (later, Doonesbury).

Bananacomm: Bring banana-related stuff to meetings.

NASAcmm: Oddly enough, responsible for NASA. Went to space shots. Its functions have been taken over by Whooshcomm, a revival of the ancient Rocket Committee. (Well, rockets sort of go *whoosh*.)

Candycomm: Responsible for sending a one-man, one-way expedition to Mars, George Phillies to be that man. (*Mars*, get it, huh?)

MADcomm: Keeps track of the Society's collection of MAD magazines.

Analogcomm: In the archives, it is said that the Society used to own some *Playboy* magazines with SF-related stories. They were sold, with the notation: "Received \$N for *Playboys* and so forth." A committee was established to find out what the and-so-forth was. And-So-Forth becomes A.S.F = *Astounding Science Fiction*, which became *Analog*, hence the name. Since the person appointed, Paul Mailman, also happened to be responsible for the Keyholder schedule sign-up sheets, the committee absorbed that function.

Official Second: Honorary title given to the member of the Loyal Opposition who runs against the official slate. Generally assigned to whichever hack nomination was most beaten into the ground at the election. Past title-holders include Cherey's studded leather belt, the blue string macramé bikini, and Klyd (a boa constrictor), among others.

Coopcomm: Tells the Coop what SF to buy. I have no idea if it was ever functional.

Chartcomm: Designed the organizational chart.

Cornelia Otis: A person that is not the same as *our* skinner. (Cornelia Otis Skinner was a somewhat famous actress and author.) Collects and reports on all entropies at meetings. At its creation in 1968, Joe Ross was appointed to it and ordered to generate random noise.

Ambassador to the Null Set: May have been created in 1970. May have a rationale for existence, or maybe just seemed like a good idea.

International Committee to Overdamp the New Wave: Also probably seemed like a good idea.

Intercomm: Responsible for international SF, that is, trades magazines with non-MIT fans. Also collects Perry Rhodans, etc.

Kangarooconn: The Society's contact in Australia.

Keeper of the Schultz: Paula Schultz was a member in the '60s whose current boyfriend was given this post.

Secretary of HEW and Grammarcomm: I have absolutely no idea. If anyone does, please let me know.

Hub Overgovernment: A reference to the **Telzey Amberdon** stories — the organization in charge of the "official" psis, as opposed to the unofficial ones like Telzey.

Telzey Amberdon: The Skinner's "significant other." It used to be the Skinner's girlfriend, but has become a unisex post now that MITSFS is an equal opportunity organization. Traditionally vacant, but this has not been true for the past few years. Named for a character in stories by James H. Schmitz who was supposed to be the most perfect woman in the universe. (Every so often, somebody looking through old magazines runs across a story called "The Telzey Toy," and this provides hilarity for a few days.

Stranglecomm: There are three different versions of what this office is: 1) Mark Swanson threatened to call The Alpert at 3 a.m. until he got an article for TZ out of him. (I sympathize!) The Alpert said he would strangle him. The committee was set up to call The Alpert at 3 a.m. and identify itself as Swanson. 2) Calls up the Skinner at 3 a.m. and says "My name is Marc Alpert, and I'm cool." then hangs up. 3) Calls up Jourcomm at 3 a.m. and asks, "When is the TZ coming out?"

Ass.comm: Committee to assassinate the Skinner.

### 3 Active Offices Not Appearing on the Chart

Panthercomm: Responsible for Pinkdex, the index to the MITSFS Library. Pinkdex was named after its first compiler, Fuzzy Pink (Marilyn) Wisowaty, known three days as Fuzzy Pink Niven (yes, that Niven). Assisted by **Mancinicom** (Henry Mancini wrote the Pink Panther theme music).

Treasurer: Repairs books. This office may have been named to provide an out if there were no qualified undergrads to be LHE. Then again, maybe not.

Boredcomm: Puts stuff on the MITSFS bulletin board, which is found just off the Infinite Corridor.

Mobcomm: Purchases books at the New England Mobile Book Fair, which has everything in print at a discount. We use it to fill gaps in the collection.

Acidcomm: Assistant Idiot in charge of book covering. Puts plastic covers on the hardcover books. (Also known as **Bluebellcomm** since the plastic came from Bluebell Plastics.)

Sitcomm: Reports on television programs of interest to the Society.

MITSFS Mistress: Sacrifices the Virgin Watermelon at the Picnic. There may have once been other job requirements; Sylvia Johnson, the first one, resigned the post because of "back trouble".

Pianocomm: Responsible for the display of Keyholder pictures in the Library, as well as revisions of the Keyholder Notes.

Boscomm: Reports on Boskone.

Famecomm: Reports on mentions of the Society or its members in non-MITSFS publications.

## 4 Dead, Defunct or Dormant Offices

War Council: Set up to contend with the Fountainhead of Evil on Campus Here (FECH), i.e. Inscomm. (The Institute Committee was the governing body on campus prior to the creation of the UA General Assembly. It consisted of a bunch of greasy student types.) It later expanded to “fight the good fight” against *The Tech*. Also got bookcases for the Library.

Banquomm: Originally Bankcomm, in charge of food for the annual MITSFS Banquet (which is also defunct).

Pilecomm: Compilation Committee. In charge of making lists of the best SF or keeping records of books in the Library.

Knockcomm: Assigned to get a Gavel. It did, and also got a sounding board. Flushed November 18, 1960.

Psico: Set up September 23, 1960 to investigate (seriously) psychic phenomena. Its members were referred to as psicoceramics (crackpots). It was flushed less than a year later.

Provisional Committee to Look Into Dean Drive: What it says. Set up October 7, 1960.

Special Committee to Write to L. Sprague de Camp Asking Him To Come If It Won't Cost Us Too Much: What more can I say? Established September 23, 1960

Ughcomm: Set up March 5, 1976 for Uri Gutman. (UG-Comm, h=hyphen)

Dismil: Dishonorable Millercomm. Set up in order to adjourn Meetings February 6, 1976 because Miller wasn't there.

Malcomm: Formed February 9, 1979 to find out what Malcom (Skerry, aka Malcolm Y) was dropping before he claimed there were *people* in the Library.

Omnicom: Set up briefly to reply to a letter from *Omni* concerning the Society and how it could get the membership list for the Sales Department. Later reported on random *Omni* articles.

Smokcomm: Formed October 13, 1961 to promote a MITSFS smoker. (An event, not a nicotine addict.)

Cardcomm: Got membership cards from Cambridge Press. Established February 9, 1962.

Ambassador to Boston University, So Called, Administration Thereof: Set up right after the B.U., So Called, Administration was recognized by the society on October 12, 1962. There is no evidence that it ever did anything — the Ambassador, not the Administration.

Comité d'Affaires Étrangères pour les Pays de Langue Française (Roughly translated, Foreign Affairs Committee for French-Language Countries): Wrote a letter to Charles De Gaulle, and actually got a reply (from a flunky). I hope the letter was written in better French than the committee name was.